FICTION BY THE BEST WRITERS

CRAZY RIVER BRIDGE

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from headquarters. It was the night of the seventh day of almost unremitent rain, the night of the Storm on the Blue Ridge division. Since noon ting the Crazy River had been justifying bad." led by raging tributaries in the hills. he hearts of the bridge and roadway

o Shelburn by a dripping messenger eleven o'clock Mahoney's report read, to take him to the bridge.

On its heels came another: "Durban reports dam just gone out on head-

There was gloom in the sky, gloom in waters. Can you possibly come? Ma. serted in the storm. The headlight wast dim lines of the bridge and the fight was in progress once more.

face with his assistant. Hatless was huge mattresses of brush.

hands held trumpet-wise. In the same were lost." of the stream Number Fifty-four, the on peal, booming, echoing, rumbling, waters strove to overwhelm and rend that Oliver and his fireman were the ew Orleans Mail, was due but it was not expected that she would try to cross with the river in its present state and in the face of Mahoney's order that no train be allowed on the bridge until the danger lessened. The despatchers would doubtless hold her at Pilot Junction. Shelburn nodded in token of understanding and took com-The Durban dam gone! The chief tance into the wind-ridden deluge mand while Mahoney sought out an en-

> As the chief watched the sinking of "Pilot Junction says Fifty-four ran by the board there in the storm. She'll

Shelburn issued orders as fast as he the structure against the rush of the when she should be over. The waves by the gale at his back, Shelburn and in torment the big engineer Back and forth he wrested for a lit- walked rapidly past a freight train, prayed that she would cross before a yet outwardly calm, master of stairs. Of railroad stock for two gen- freight, a train of frightened bawling Now that the northbound track was Every few erations was the woman who met him cattle, and a long string of sober-hued being blocked by a freight whose rear minutes there came to him echoes of at their head. Bred in her was all the Pullmans. Just back of these last was lights could be seen slowly advancing men are the servants of the Traffic, ists, passengers, brutes, and freight send an engine across in safety to stop "Six-thirty. 35.4. Still rising. Ma. She knew something of the havor be- awaited alike the mad will of the river Fifty-four on the farther side. Then read the answer to the question in her Shelburn hurried down the tracks he other shore there suddenly flashed the caught above the roar of the gale and blinding glare of a headlight through "Tell the despatcher's office every the angry waters the wonderful voice which the rain fell like a thousand hour how he is," he said, "and they of the singer in her car. Something darting spears of silver light. Slowly, will let me know. If the worst should of the spirit of the night was in her steadily, the long train drew across the come I can get back in an hour or two. soul as she sang. "Die Walküre" on bridge, her bell tolling dismally. Shel-Good-bye, little girl." And in a great the river-bank in the storm where men burn caught sight of two figures on the rush of tenderness he bent over her, and Nature fought in primeval rage right-hand side of her engine's cab To the very fullest she understood, for the possession of a bridge! The as she passed, and afterward he knew At seven o'clock came the news. To the very fullest she understood, for the possession of a bridge! The as she passed, and attended to the body was feet. Still rising. Have ordered For one passionate moment she clung engineer's head went up as though he that one of them was dead, the body one of the body story of the body story of the body to him, then she looked up into his heard a call to battle and, half believ. of old "Pap" Sterling who had died on was a note from Bancroft saying that fine strong face. "I'm proud of you, ing, his eyes swept the inky clouds his engine. Like one of the lords of the wires were still good as far as the my own big man," she said softly, for sight of the Valkyries riding in old whose bodies were set at the head of the feast, Pap was making his last Function, north of there. Outside the through beautifully." Then she In sheltered spots ahead fires run home through the night and the rain fell ceaselessly, dripping, splash, through beautifully." Then she in sheltered spots ahead fires run nome through the night and the ing, driven against the window-panes helped him into his great rubber coat gleamed where kettles of coffee for the tempest. With quickening speed the shaking the solid ground beneath it. Himb from limb this man-made creat, handsomest men he had come beneath it. against the house as though in agony. Impost of truss and beam, die is safe, Lad-die to safe!"

Overhead were soft footfalls and an were out, their wires down in the genoccasional little cry of pain that cut eral weekage. Climbing over ob-

"Six P. M. 34.6 feet. Still rising," train possible was annulled and the Here the big passenger engine that he light of conflict. Lanterns flashed notized into backing over on it to help was carried far out over the river by beneath the yellow river. A tremen that he brief report that was handed sidings began to fill to overflowing. At had asked Bancroft for was waiting wetly here and there. Shouts, the hold it down while Fifty-four was the gale. Immediately men appeared dous wave spread out over it and, as creaking of cars, the puffing and whis- crossing, was hurrying back to safer fighting their way back into the teeth though in mockery, its edge lapped the "43.6. Rising faster. Am putting "Praise the Virgin, the wind's be- tling of the locomotives, arose only to ground. The workers on the tracks of the storm to regain the shore. A boots of the man whom the water had steam-shovel to work at Monica get- hind us on this run," said the wiry be snatched aloft by the wind and be scattered again before the approach of sound like the soughing of the wind beaten. His head and shoulders bowed ting out rock. Need more men. Looks little engineer, Oliver McCullough, as blended in the mad tumult all about, the cars of stone that shot through a thousand, thousand, thousand pines, beneath the bitterness of the blow. In they sped out through the great yard Beyond, lit by the lightning and the light of the fires and out on to the not loud yet seeming to dominate all addition to his benumbing weariness that cowered dripping and almost de- head-lights on the engines, were the bridge, and the scarce-interrupted others, grew and grew. Another light- there settled upon him like a leaden only sent its ray half the usual dis- wild, tumbling, foaming, waters of On the storm-swept bank Shelburn, above the bridge, stretching from bank the flood lay part of his best work and the Crazy: over all the flying clouds with anxiety for his little lad gnawing to bank, a great wave bore down on it. of a still more priceless thing, his

and the writhing blur of wind and unceasingly at his soul, set his face The Durban flood had come. like a mask to hide his suffering and Clean and bare it swept the bridge, know in the fullest the heartsickness At the little telegraph shanty near watched the battle, directing the re- The heavily loaded cars were whirled of such a loss. Instinctively the others the bank Shelburn paused long enough pulse of the enemy. More cars of and tumbled about and smashed drew back from him as though it were for the news from home and to leave broken stone were pushed out on the against the girders. The water poured indecent to look boldly upon the instructions as to finding him. The embankment where muddy, half- over the embankment, tore resistlessly strong man's helplessness and defeat, boy was still holding his own. As drowned men fought the raging stream at the earthwork and flooded the rails he turned to leave he came face to desperately with earth and rock and far back from the bridge. Fires were The Crazy swept on through the

"Thank the Lord, you've come!" he failed," he added. "I only got two final assault upon the thing it hated, lough's engine and the little engineer, shouted into his chief's ear through words of it, 'Laddle is,' before they Grim and awful was the struggle now peering into it, knew how he would

fashion he outlined the situation. The Better no word at all than those two bridge could only watch and wait. It nothing—there was absolutely nothing flood from the broken dam had not which meant the scales had turned, must make its fight alone and the to say-and he reached for throttle yet reached them, but the rails were but gave no hint of whether they worn-out men slept wherever they and sand-rod. Twice the steam had now only three feet above the water, stood for life or death. Everything dropped down on the rain-soaked shot hissing out through the cylinder On this side the river was eating at faded from the big engineer's vision ground, sprawling grotesquely like the cocks when the mud-covered, unkempt the bank as though trying to leave the except a woman who was needing him dead on a battle-field. Against the figure of the operator bore down on bridge stranded over the old channel as she bent over a child in whom fast-graying sky in the east Shelburn the engine, leaping the prostrain forms while it flowed through a new one, their very heart-strings were bound up, loomed large as he waited for an en- of the weary sleepers as he ran "Mea-Brush mattresses were being sunk "Allah, be merciful to me a coward!" gine to be sent down to bear him sage for Mr. Shelburn! he collect as under the weight of tons of earth and he groaned. "I can't stand this, I've home. The downpour had ceased and he grasped the hand-hold on the

bankment that was the approach to Heaven and earth carcened and blazed and smoked feebly because of "Yes, I know," said the Chief della the bridge. On a slight elevation two rocked and were split asunder by a wet fuel. The Chief found his must as he took it. "The boy's dead the hundred yards back the linemen were bolt of lightning that made all things cles rigid and his jaw aching with couldn't have lived through the night busy with a shed for the telegraph in- lighter than day. Balls of blue fire his sympathetic tension at the strain I knew that when I came. struments. The present location would skipped over the wind-lashed waters he knew the bridge was enduring. It The telegrapher gave him a christian ready engines from side-tracked trains work of the bridge. For one little weariness of some vast dumb animate "Better read it," he suggested. farther up the line had been cut loose moment the wind died and a great Thing.

ning flash revealed the peril. Just cloud the conviction that down under

put out and the men driven to the great gap in the rails. The sun burst Mahoney, water pouring off his leather A hurrying, anxious figure struggled higher ground. The previous flood- through the clouds and the crests of clothing, four days' growth of heard through the press, seeking the Chief, stage had been as a spring freshet to the river hills were touched with on his chin, living in a world that It was the operator, with news that this one. Four times its usual width glory, but Shelburn did not see. His for forty-eight hours had consisted the wires were gone to the south, and flowing three feet above the tracks face was gray beneath the grime as only of a bridge and an insane river. "Message coming for you when they on the bridge, the Crazy made its he swung up into the cab of McCul-

rock along the threatened railway em- got to go back to them and know." the wind was dying away. New fires tender.

and sent down to the river to bring far-off murmur was heard that carried Relentlessly the swollen river hurled paper he discovered that it was the back as far as Monica the stalled a monstrous nameless menace in its itself against the appropriate. Never a most beautiful day since the world trains at the bridge. On the other side sound. Then came the thunder, peal second's rest did it got as the swirling began. For the first time he noticed

reputation. Only an engineer can

in which the human allies of the look when he was old. Oliver said

be unsafe when the flood came. Al- and from point to point of the steel- was as though he beheld the agony of searching glance as he dropped of

When Shelburn looked up from the



"I'm proud of you, my own big man"

Landslides threatened where for two days.

Three other bridges had the river wrested from the railroad. With the loss of the third Holcomb had brought from the west a tall bronzed man who tunnelled the Rockies, spanned mountain streams in the Himalayas and put a pair of rails through the This was Shelburn, and he had held the river bound and helpless between the piers of the bridge he had thrown Spring after spring it had one stark raving crazy, tearing tooth ing, frenzied, swirling, a yellow demon of a stream gone utterly mad. But meyer in the memory of the oldest big bridge battled for its existence as Mt was doing now. And the reports from the upper reaches of the river Torehoded ominous things.

But overhead was that one thingthe tiny son whom God's finger was almost touching. The crisis would and now his brain was probably come this night the doctors their pitcous appeal.

Said, so the Chief Engineer was re
Back and forth he wremaining at home, watching the situhimself and his emotions. the fight with the elements without and of that with a greater enemy in the room above. Again the bell rang.

Kelly with word that in Pine Creek own. gorge six miles of track that had been under water all day had gone out along with a high wooden trestle. That meant that the Mineral division was cut in two for a week to come. But ii Shelburn's bridge held the main line would be kept open.

more men and twelve cars of stone from Pilot Junction." Along with it ranches of a tree creaked and beat the man like a knife.

they did not fall, washouts came with groaned. Sixty-one miles above the ahead and the soaking road-bed was gine to take him back to Damascus out warning. Boyd, of the Maintebridge it had held back the waters of none too good; but it was a race be. Junction, where he could have copies the North Fork. Now in two hours tween Shelburn and the flood and the of the bridge specifications ready to seventy-two; Shelburn, Chief Engineer, the North Fork. Now in two hours tween Shelburn and the flood and the of the bridge specifications ready to not at all. At his great bridge over the crest of the greater flood would be stake was great. Oliver took chances forward to the builders should the the Crazy, Mahoney, his young assist- upon the scene of the battle where he never took before. He prayed to great structure go out. Borne down ant, had been working and watching already there was a scant seven feet the saints that Vinson, in the des. faintly on the wind came the sound of waves and the ties.

sequences to thousands of others, the struggle lay before them. suffering bodily and mentally that would
For a long distance back from the he had left him a few moments before, tially at their lowly task.

honey," was the message. Scarcely ing wrought, and in his grave eyes she that would not let them across. As the red lights halted and from the had the door closed before the tele- read the answer to the question in her Shelburn harried down the tree before there suddenly flashed the

bridge, but were gone beyond Pilot "Now go. Laddie and I will come thunder.

between the muddy foam-crested patcher's chair, had a wire with which the blasting at Monica to loosen the to clear the way for him and strove rock for the steam-shovel. Could be come? For ten minutes intently to see further into the lumihe fought it out with himself. Hol- nous wall of gray that steadily re. another mattress the operator handed comb was already on the way. Down treated before him. For the rest he him a damp, wilted bit of paper. He there at the river they needed him, could only trust blindly to the "stand- held his lantern up to it to read, "Not His bridge needed him. Yet dearer to ing luck of an Irishman." Ninety so well. Fever rising. Will wire him than all his beloved bridges were minutes the three men in the cab again in fifteen minutes." He thrust the little lad overhead and his mother, rode through the storm with death it into his pocket and the man stood He owed them more than he did the never far away, but the wires and the on tip-toe to shout yet more ill news. road. Then for one illuminated in- luck and the rails held, and as they stant he saw with clearness the con- rounded a curve the first signs of the

prossing flagman had there been a follow the breaking of the railroad's bridge the tracks were congested with could make himself heard. One man week like the past one. Never had the line. He recognized the immutable stalled trains, while on the sidings of ran to hold up the dozen cars of stone law of the rails, that come what may the little storage yard their engines that were about to be pushed out on they must be kept open; only to feel had been pressed into service to han, the southbound track to help weight anew that he could not leave at such dle material cars. Atlantics, Pacifics, The chief himself should be there; a time. "Don't go away, Daddy. I'm moguls, consolidateds, and a little four. Durban flood, another to get the way only one thing could keep him away. afraid," were the child's words when wheeler from a local, worked impar. cleared for the passage of the Mail

The crisis would and now his brain was filled with Carried along almost without effort were on a level with the bridge ties tle space and then he mounted the then the local passenger, another wall of water should sweep the rails. quiet heroism of the women whose the private car of a great singer. Art. over it, there was no opportunity to

eral wreckage. Climbing over ob. deluge. Men hurried to and fro.

the bridge receded rapidly now. The he yelled to the engineer of a passing snapping of bolts and rods. The su- it all was," he said to himself as they stackes, bending his head against the breathless, tense-faced, mud-spattered to the engineer of a passing snapping of bolts and rods. The su- it all was," he said to himself as they stacked, bending his head against the breathless, tense-faced, mud-spattered to the engineer of a passing snapping of bolts and rods. Hourly the river rose and the fury driving rain, stumbling and groping in from head to foot, their eyes red from engineer on the freight, whom, in spite locomotive, and, as other engines perstructure parted from the piers, field homeward the station of the wind and rain increased. Every the darkness, he reached the station loss of sleep and burning with the of orders, "Stubby" Sullivan had hyp-joined in. a wild chorus of warning poised for a moment, and slid slowly freshness of the station.

be on the bridge any minute now."



Beyond, lit by the lightning and the headlights on the engines. were the vast dim lines of the bridge

by furious gusts of wind. The wet and he was out in the night workers were kept boiling. Swirling cars whipped past and were lost to But in that moment's comparative ure that ventured to oppose them, and that the big engine's thunderous Limbs torn from trees by the gale smoke from the engines drove hori- sight in the darkness and driving calm Shelburn caught the significance Down beneath the surface there was a exhaust were singing exultantly, "Lad-